

This week's community profile: Rio Creek



Shelf stockers: Tammy Dauck, left, and her sister, Brenda Nimmer, stock shelves at Walter's of Rio

Creek Agri-Center Complex, a family-owned business headed by their father, Don.

This place is 'hometown friendly'

By Karil Van Boxel

Press-Gazette

RIO CREEK — Julie Laurent's job as the only teller at the State Bank of Kewaunee branch is enviable.

"It's the people," she says when asked why her job in Rio Creek is special. "Sometimes other girls (bank employees) want to come out, but I say no."

**Press-Gazette photos
by Sandee Gerbers**

Laurent, 26,
822 Ellis St.,
Kewaunee,
has found the

Kewaunee County community to be "hometown friendly" during her 18 months at the bank. The branch doubles as a post office.

"People sometimes just come in to visit," Laurent says. "I'd miss the people if I ever left."

Rio Creek is a farming community 28 miles east of Green Bay and 5 miles from Algoma and Casco. It is on the border of the towns of Lincoln and Casco.

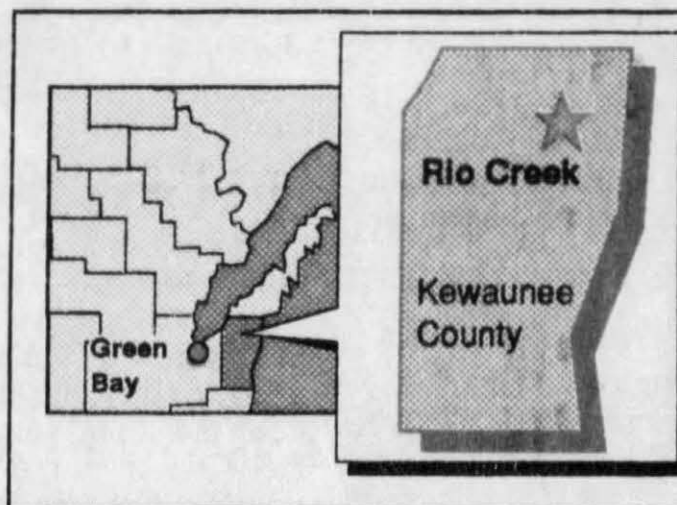
Jerry Barta, 30, was born and raised in Rio Creek. He says the community hasn't changed much. "There are pretty much the same families here. ... Everybody knows everybody."

Barta and his brother, Dave, 34, took over the Rio Creek Feed Mill two years ago. Their parents, Don and Jeanette, bought the mill in 1958.

A Future Farmers of America project led Barta into his other occupation, hog farming. He owns about 1,000 mixed-breed hogs.

Next to the feed mill at E4341 Kewaunee County K is another family's enterprise, Walter's of Rio Creek Agri-Center Complex.

Don Walter, 54, started working with



The Rio Creek file

- **Population:** 100 to 200.
- **In a name:** Rio Creek winds through this community, which may be how it got its name. Residents aren't sure. The name is pronounced ri(long i)-o krik.
- **Sweet tooth:** Dolly Brann, who broasts chicken at Brann's Place, bakes desserts on weekends. Her ice cream cake, tortes and cheesecakes are so popular some people want to know what dessert is before they order dinner.

his dad in 1957. His wife, Wendy, and daughters, Tammy Dauck, 26, E4321 County K, and Brenda Nimmer, 24, 1408 Milwaukee St., Kewaunee, are part of the family business. Even Dauck's son Justin, 7, helps.

Nimmer joined her father in 1990 after five years at Algoma Hardwoods Inc. She is computerizing the accounting system. Her husband, Paul, also helps out.

Dauck, who also owns a hardware store in Algoma with her husband, Brian, concentrates on merchandising.

Before it was owned by Walter, the building was occupied by Rayton Manufacturing, which employed 80 people and built church furniture.

Walter also owns the land for the airport, known as "Rio Creek International" to local people. The air strip formerly was the site of Rio Creek Aviators' fly-ins. It is used by private planes when Lake Michigan fishing is good.

"People from Illinois and Minnesota fly in sometimes and we provide the taxi service," Nimmer says.

Rio Creek also has a store with upstairs apartments, an auto body shop owned by Walter's brother, David, and

taverns.

The man considered the unofficial mayor by some and "Grandpa" or Santa Claus to area youngsters, is Herman Kirchman, 80, E4364 County K. He farmed until 1953, worked 25 years at Algoma Hardwoods, then moved here.

"Years ago it was kind of a German community," he says. "It's a nice town. That's why I stayed here all my life."

Kirchman also opens his garage to schoolchildren who want to see his collection of historical items.

Brann's Place, a tavern at N7298 County P known for its country fare, was purchased four years ago by Richard and Dolly Brann of Calumet City, Ill.

Richard runs the bar while Dolly and son, Chris, cook. Daughter Terry Willems is a waitress.

Originally from Algoma, Brann wanted to return to his roots after retiring. He bought the place before Dolly saw it. Fortunately, she likes country life.

"This is our home, our business, our social life all rolled into one," she says.

■ **Next week:** Baileys Harbor in Door County



Green thumb: Teller Julie Laurent waters a plant at the State Bank of Kewaunee's Rio Creek branch.



Behind bar: Richard Brann talks to customers at his family business, Brann's Place.